

THE REAL AGATHA

BY EDITH HUNTINGTON MASON

PICTURES BY WELLS WALTERS FREY CAMPBELL ALESHIRE WILSON

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SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I.—Lord Wilfred Vincent and Archibald Terhune are introduced at the opening of the story, in England, the latter relating the tale. The pair on an outing miss their train and seeking recreation meet "The Honorable Agatha Wyckhoff," whose hand is much sought after, because of her wealth. On visiting the Wyckhoff castle they are introduced to two other girls, both known as Agatha Wyckhoff.

CHAPTER II.—At dinner three other Agatha Wyckhoffs are introduced and the plot revealed. The deceased step-father, in an eccentric moment, made his will so that the real Agatha, heiress to his fortune and the castle at Wye, England, might wed her affinity. Thus Mrs. Armistead, chaperon, was in duty bound to keep the real Agatha's identity unknown and suitors were invited to try out for the hand of the heiress. An attempt by Terhune to gather a clue from the chaperon fails.

CHAPTER III.—Terhune finds old books containing picture of a former Baroness Wyckhoff, which is exactly like Agatha Sixth, whom he is courting. Vincent entertains them all and while riding with Agatha Fifth she confesses her love for him and also that she is the real heiress. He spurns her proposal.

(Continued from last week)

This was true, incongruous as it may seem, Vincent's one serious hobby—I don't consider his paint-dabbling serious—which had to do with research and scholarship, was his love for things ancient in general, and family trees in particular. It had been Baroness Wyckhoff's wish that some review of the lives of the barons of that name should be made, since the last one had died, and Mrs. Armistead had given her secretary this work to do. I eyed Vincent searchingly as he spoke, but his face was so thoroughly unconscious that my suspicions were disarmed completely.

"Yes," he said, "there are a lot of very interesting old books in that library."

"Yes," I said, "that's why you and Miss Marsh spend so much time there, I suppose. I'm glad to hear it. I really couldn't see what you thought was so attractive." A sharp blow in the chest interrupted my speech.

"Shut up," Vincent hissed in my ear; "don't you see Miss Marsh?" As he spoke that young person tripped lightly up the wide stone steps of the veranda and was about to pass on when Vincent stopped her.

"Good morning," he said, his hat in his hand. "Are you beginning work so early?" and he looked at the papers carried under her arm.

"Yes," she said, "I have a new idea about that last chapter we wrote."

"I'm sorry I can't be with you this morning," he answered, and she passed into the house. She wore a white frock and a natty little blue apron, and I must admit looked very fresh and dainty, but Wilfred's tone was so cool and conventional that I mentally freed him again from my accusation that he was in the midst of a warm flirtation, though you will agree with me that appearances had been very much against him.

But that evening when he and I were having our nightly bedroom colloquy I was obliged to admit that Vincent, considering his methods, had accomplished a great deal. With some embarrassment he related to me the tale of his horseback ride in the morning, and I must say it completely unsettled my belief in the discovery I had made as to the identity of the real Honorable Agatha Wyckhoff. Neither Vincent nor I knew what to make of it.

"Do you know, Arch," he said, striding up and down my room, "I've been through a horrible experience to-day? It was an awful shock to me, and a lesson."

"I'm glad it was a lesson," said I. There are so few lessons in Vincent's life.

"Yes," he said, "I felt like a beastly cad. And I don't see what I've done to deserve it. Of course, I've held her hand a couple of times—"

"That had habit of yours again," I murmured.

"And I've looked at her a lot—she's got the most soul-moving eyes I know."

I didn't know, but I nodded. The boy was very much in earnest.

"But I never thought," he went on—"I never thought she—"

"—the words seemed to stick in his throat."

"Great heaven, man," I cried in my impatience, "get it out. What didn't you think she'd do?"

"I never thought she'd really care for me," he muttered, shamefacedly, and turned his back on me.

"What do you mean?" I demanded, impatiently. He is most exasperating.

"Why, this," he ceased his restless walk and stood on the hearth rug, facing me. "We'd been out about an hour this morning, Agatha Fifth and I, and we'd been getting up into the hilly country, when suddenly we came out of the woods and saw below us the grandest stretch of country you can imagine."

Here he broke off and went into a rhapsody over the sky-line and the grazing sheep, and said something about Utopia and Eden and other things like that, until he got through at last and came to the interesting part. They can't help going on like

again he misinterpreted.

"You don't mean that, I know, Arch," he said. "Of course I wouldn't marry the girl when I really don't care for her. But wasn't it the deuce of a position to be in?"

"Oh, Wilfred, Wilfred!" I mourned, "twenty millions right in your grasp, and you threw them away. I wish I'd had your chance. Your poor father, how disappointed he'd be if he knew."

"He'd be more disappointed in me if I had changed my mind and said I would marry her just for the sake of the money," said the young man, crossly, and turning on his heel he left the

Vincent children and his eyes looked wicked. "Wish you luck, Arch," he said. "I've been watching your charitable efforts to cut me out and be a father to my little friend, Agatha Fifth, with great admiration—"

"I forgot to tell you," he lowered his voice, for we could see Agatha Second on the veranda talking to Agatha Fifth—"I forgot to tell you that what Agatha Fifth told me isn't true."

"Isn't true?" I repeated in consternation.

"No," she confessed to me about a week ago that she only said she was the real Honorable Agatha to make me marry her. She thought, the foolish little girl, that she only had to tell me she was the heiress to make me love her. And she said she was sorry and wouldn't do it again and cried like a child, and I forgave her and comforted her. She'll get over it all right!" and laughing hilariously the young rascal ran upstairs.

I was really vexed with Wilfred about this. I thought it was very unkind of him to keep me in the dark for so long about Agatha Fifth's confession. What a lot of time I'd been wasting! I resolved that I would return to Agatha Sixth at the first opportunity, and I felt glad, even justified, that I had not told him about that album which had betrayed the secret to me. At this moment Agatha Second appeared in the doorway.

"Hullo, Mr. Terhune," she said, "where's Lord Wilfred?"

"He went upstairs," I said. "I don't know for what." I could hear him in the distance singing at the top of his lusty young voice—

"Gentlemen rankers all are we—"

till an ear-splitting shout from Agatha Second drowned the song completely.

"O-h-h-h, Freddy," shrieked the young lady, with a lung power that equaled Vincent's.

I shivered with indignation at the liberty. "Freddy!" indeed!

At the third shout he heard her and stopped singing to read the air with an answering cry.

"For goodness' sake, what are you so long about?" she called. "Do hurry up!"

"Coming!" roared Vincent, clattering down the two flights of stairs like a wild horse, and I hurried out to join Agatha Fifth, my hands over my ears. Young people are so noisy nowadays.

Several evenings later Agatha Fourth had arranged to give a progressive dinner party. She was to be the hostess and the rest of us were her guests. It was an evening-dress affair, and I must say as we sat down to dinner I never saw a prettier group of girls.

Then the fun began. Agatha Fourth's idea in having a progressive dinner party was for each of the girls to move up one place with each course so that they could all have turns sitting by us. It was delightful, really, I don't know that I ever attended a jollier dinner party. Vincent kept quoting from the Mad Tea Party in "Alice in Wonderland," and the girls laughed at every single thing he said. Mrs. Armistead, I am ashamed to say, was not present; her head ached and she had dined in her room. I am not naturally noisy or riotous, but the laughter and jokes of those six girls were so infectious that I was obliged to join in with them. Vincent sat at one end of the table and I at the other, with three girls on each side of us. The secretary, of course, was not present.

Agatha Fourth had decorated the table with some of the yellow roses and wild fern that grew near the castle. Agatha Sixth and I had found them many times in our wanderings and, by the way, she was looking especially lovely that evening. The girls all wore shimmering white gowns, similar in design, with silver ornaments, but Agatha Sixth's gown was cream-colored with ornaments of gold, and well it did become her dark beauty.

We had reached the very end of the dinner, and had just made the last change of places, which left me with my favorite Agatha Sixth on my right and Agatha Third on my left.

Suddenly, as the talk died down and a certain contented silence fell upon us, Vincent rose to his feet, and bowing to us formally, began to speak:

"Ladies and gentlemen," he said, making the last word pointedly singular, while the girls all laughed, "I think you are all with me when I propose a vote of thanks to—er—our hostess"—(I felt that he had nearly said "Agatha Fourth!")—"our hostess, for giving us so delightful an entertainment." He bowed to Agatha Fourth and went on:

"If all progressive tea parties are termed mad I hope I may attend many such. But as I look around me, gentlemen and ladies fair, across the red glow of the candle that turns the roses to redder gold, and as I gaze upon the youth and beauty here assembled, the like of which I have never before looked upon—he made a courtly inclination of his head that included every maid at the table, and they all sighed—I heard them—"as I look upon this noble room, this exquisite table, and think of the graciousness of such hospitality, I am inspired to propose a toast in which I feel confident you will all join me." At this climax Vincent raised his glass above his head, "To the real Agatha!" he cried—"to the real Honorable Agatha!"

(To be continued next week)

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AGATHA FOURTH.

that these artist fellows, and Vincent never loses an opportunity to get in a bit of description.

"Well," he continued, "I was just enjoying that view and saying nothing, when she stopped switching the tops off the harebells with her crop and, turning those warm hazel eyes of hers on me, she said in a low voice, as if what she said didn't matter at all, 'I love you!'"

"What!" I shouted. "She didn't?" "She did," asserted Vincent ruefully, but with firmness—"She did. Just like that, out of a clear sky. Simply folded her hands and looked at me and told me she loved me."

"Angels and ministers of grace, defend us!" I ejaculated. Nothing else seemed adequate. "What under the sun did you do?"

"Why, I told her simply that I didn't love her, and couldn't marry her, and I was very sorry, but I thought we'd better get on our horses and go home."

"Quite right, if you don't really care," I said, "but oh, Vincent!" as a thought struck me, "just think, she might have been the Honorable Agatha—the real and only Honorable!"

"She said," said Vincent.

I was speechless. This was the end of it, then. I saw the millions taking unto themselves wings, and my pan of milk spilled. The real Honorable Agatha had been discovered, the secret was out, but she had avowed herself as loving Vincent and he had spurned her. After such a performance there was no chance for either of us.

"How do you know she was?" I asked, weakly.

"She told me so herself," he answered.

"But after you refused her, I suppose?"

"Of course," said Vincent, resignedly.

"But, Wilfred, my boy," I cried, springing up, and knocking off my glasses in my excitement, "couldn't you change your mind, couldn't you fix it up? If she really cared I should think you could!"

Though this event would have proved the deathblow to my own hopes, still my interest in Vincent's welfare is so genuine that I couldn't help this anxious exhortation. But

room. Vincent's getting more quick tempered every day lately, and he used to be so good natured. I'm sure it was only natural and very disinterested in me to bewail for him the result of the unfortunate affair that morning.

CHAPTER IV.

For some days after that I was in a quandary. Here, in the face of my discovery in the library, was Vincent's positive information that Agatha Fifth was the heiress. Reluctantly I determined that the likeness between Agatha Sixth and the picture of the baroness was accidental, and began to devote myself to the unfortunate Agatha Fifth. She seemed much inclined to discourage me, but I persevered and we soon became great friends. I found she was only 18, and drew my own conclusions from this fact. At 18 one's convictions are never very deep-rooted, neither are one's love affairs, and I thought it likely that the girl would soon forget her ill-prospered attachment for Vincent's handsome face, and might begin to think of someone else. Surely this was a very natural belief! So the first two weeks of our stay at the castle sped by and I saw to my satisfaction that I was gaining ground with the Honorable Agatha every day, while poor Vincent wasted his time flirting with each Agatha in turn (he had taken up Agatha Sixth since my desertion) or in assisting Miss Marsh to write up a lot of old dead barons who were much better left to a decent and dignified obscurity.

One day, toward the close of the two weeks, I met Vincent hurrying through the hall toward the stairs. He had on an old velvet coat covered with paint daubs, his luncheon basket was over his shoulder, and I guessed that he was going on one of his sketching tours in search of fresh woods and pastures new.

"Where are you going, Wilfred?" I asked, as he stopped, "and where's Agatha Second?" She usually accompanied him on his sketching expeditions.

"Painting," he replied, concisely, ignoring my second question, "and where may you be going?"

"For a walk with Agatha Fifth," I answered, smiling at him—a little pityingly, perhaps. He had lost such a chance!